Introduction to the Mini-Track 'Addressing Diversity in Digitalization'

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1. Relevance

Discussions about diversity are ubiquitous, as heterogeneity within and between organizations has a critical impact on how companies explore and exploit potentials of digital innovation [5, 8]. A growing body of research has shown that the diversity of different viewpoints, mindsets, educational backgrounds, perspectives, and knowledge (or lack thereof) contributes to the advancement of digitalization across a wide range of industries [3, 4, 6]. Despite increasing attention of scholars, politicians, and the general public, it is still not an uncommon phenomenon that homogeneity in the dimensions outlined still leads to discrimination against certain groups in the development of digital technologies [7, 9]

Despite the relevance of the topic, we only have a limited understanding of the relationship between digitalization – the "phenomena and processes of adopting and using [digital] technologies in broader individual, organizational, and societal contexts" [2] – and diversity, which can be understood as the "the distribution of differences among the members of a unit" [1:1200] with respect to demographic (e.g. age, gender, nationality, ethnicity), functional (e.g. education, work experience, religion, income) and deep-level (e.g. diseases, disabilities, traits, values, beliefs) attributes.

At least two explanations are available for the relationship between digital technologies and diversity [7]. Either these newly created technological structures reveal a lack of diversity in the underlying social structures, or they help to create them. We have learned how machine learning algorithms in recruiting discriminated against female applicants [4] or facial recognition software fostered racial discrimination [5, 9]. Digital technologies start with representing our physical world with bits and bytes [11] and oftentimes, we find, they apply homogeneous categories in the process. In the given examples, we first see that digital technologies are trained on data reflecting male dominance in tech industries or existing recruiting patterns that support homogeneous workforces. Second, these technologies recreate and reinforce already dominant categories and homogeneous structures.

It is therefore worth asking whether digitalization can thereby be considered a 'diversity-blind' process. To promote greater awareness of diversity in this respect, it is important to encourage the generation of theoretical knowledge that can help to explain how digital technologies influence diversity (digital impact on diversity) and how digital technologies are shaped by diversity or the lack thereof (diversity shaping digital technology). Eventually, this understanding might help academics and practitioners alike in their efforts towards inclusive design and application processes that avoid the pitfalls described earlier.

2. Overview

In this mini-track, scholars advance our theoretical knowledge on the digital impact on diversity, i.e., on inclusive design and application processes, practices and routines of organizing data and information systems that consider the role of diversity, and the influence of diversity in shaping the role, usage, and design of digital technologies. More generally submissions advance our knowledge on the relationship between digitalization and diversity, which could lead to products and services that represent the needs and wants of diverse societies. The submissions examine the interplay between diversity and digitalization from different perspectives, such as: *design perspectives* (e.g. understanding practices that address diversity issues in designing digital artifacts, theorizing challenges related to the consideration of different dimensions of diversity in designing digital artifacts, and understanding implications of considering and neglecting societal diversity in designing digital artifacts), *organizing perspectives* (e.g. the role of individual identity and diversity in routines and practices, organizational capabilities, and knowledge sharing associated with the design and application of information systems and data, examinations of the relevance of attitudes towards diversity and related potential tensions among

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employees in digital ventures, and overviews of theoretical advances on diversity and its understanding in IS research), and *impact perspectives* (e.g. understanding outcomes of (less) inclusive design processes and organizing practices, highlighting the consequences of missing diversity reflections in design processes for digital artifacts across levels of analysis, and the development of theoretical frameworks that allow the holistic capture of impacts of (less) inclusive design practices for digital artifacts.

3. Contributions to the Mini-Track

The topic of this mini track attracted scholars from diverse backgrounds who applied a variety of different perspectives, theoretical lenses, and methodological procedures to generate theoretical knowledge of relevance for the overall topic of the track. All submissions were reviewed by scholars from as diverse fields as information systems, management, and entrepreneurship. Eventually, we selected one paper that represent the methodological breadth that we find necessary to uncover the possibilities for research in this field.

The selected study "The Digital Divide in Online Education: A Study of Underserved College Students" turned our attention towards how digital technologies have an impact on (hindering) diversity among online learners. In more detail, the authors Xuefei Deng and Sheng Yi provide a timely perspective on how access to digital technologies shapes educational success during the Covid-19 pandemic. The scholars operationalize diversity through generational status, minority background, and income and find that especially the latter decisively shapes the digital divide in online learning.

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